I.M. Pei, FAIA, RIBA  
Founder, Pei Cobb Freed & Partners  
Design Consultant, Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center

“From the beginning, I aspired to bring light, nature and humanity to the hospital so that the patients and staff within could enjoy a genuinely healing environment. It has been an honor to be a part of such a momentous project that will not only speak as an artistic statement, but will help save and improve countless lives.”

Ieoh Ming Pei was born in China in 1917, the son of a prominent banker. At age 17, he came to the United States to study architecture, and received a bachelor of architecture degree from MIT in 1940. Upon graduation he was awarded the Alpha Rho Chi Medal, the MIT Traveling Fellowship, and the AIA Gold Medal. In 1942, Pei enrolled in the Harvard Graduate School of Design where he studied under Walter Gropius; six months later, he volunteered his services to the National Defense Research Committee in Princeton. Pei returned to Harvard in 1944 and completed his master of architecture in 1946, simultaneously teaching on the faculty as an assistant professor (1945-48). Awarded the Wheelwright Traveling Fellowship by Harvard in 1951, he traveled extensively in England, France, Italy and Greece. I. M. Pei became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1954.

In 1948, William Zeckendorf invited Pei to accept the newly created post of Director of Architecture at Webb & Knapp, a real estate development corporation, resulting in many large-scale architectural and planning projects across the country. In 1955 he formed the partnership of I. M. Pei & Associates, which became I. M. Pei & Partners in 1966, and Pei Cobb Freed & Partners in 1989. The partnership received the 1968 Architectural Firm Award of the American Institute of Architects.

Pei’s personal architectural style blossomed with his design for the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado (1961-67). He subsequently gained broad national attention with the East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington (1968-78) and the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston (1965-79) – two of some thirty institutional projects executed by Pei. Others include churches, hospitals, and municipal buildings, as well as schools, libraries, and more than a dozen museums. His most recent works include the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas, the Grand Louvre in Paris, the Miho Museum in Shiga, Japan, the Schauhaus at the German Historical Museum in Berlin, and the Musée d’ Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean in Luxembourg. Among Pei’s skyscraper designs are the 72-story Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong and the Four Seasons Hotel in midtown Manhattan. He has completed two projects in his native China: the Fragrant Hill Hotel in Beijing (1982) and the Suzhou Museum in Suzhou (2006), each designed to graft advanced technology onto the roots of indigenous building and thereby sow the seed of a new, distinctly Chinese form of modern architecture.

Pei’s deep interest in the arts and education is evidenced by his numerous memberships on Visiting Committees at Harvard and MIT, as well as on several governmental panels. He has also served on the AIA Task Force on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol. A member of the AIA National Urban Policy Task Force and of the Urban Design Council of the City of New York, he was appointed to the National Council on the Humanities by President Lyndon Johnson in 1966, and to the National Council on the Arts by President Jimmy Carter in 1980. In 1983, Pei was chosen the Laureate of the Pritzker Architecture Prize: he used the $100,000 award to establish a scholarship fund for Chinese students to study architecture in the United States (with the strict proviso that they return to China to practice their profession). Among the many
academic awards bestowed on Pei are honorary doctorates from Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, New York University, Brown University, the University of Colorado, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the American University of Paris. Most recently he was awarded the Laura Honoris Causa by the University of Rome, in 2004.

Pei is a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and a Corporate Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and has also been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Design, and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1975 he was elected to the American Academy itself, which is restricted to a lifetime membership of fifty. Three years later he became Chancellor of the Academy, the first architect to hold that position, and served until 1980. Pei was inducted a "Membre de l'Institut de France" in 1984, and decorated by the French government as a Commandeur in the "Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" in 1985. On July 4, 1986, he was one of twelve naturalized American citizens to receive the Medal of Liberty from President Ronald Reagan. Two years later French President François Mitterrand inducted I.M. Pei as a Chevalier in the Légion d'Honneur, and in November 1993 he was raised to Officier. Also in 1993 he was elected an Honorary Academician of the Royal Academy of Arts in London. In 1997 the Académie d'Architecture de France elected him Foreign Member.

Among Pei's many professional honors are The Arnold Brunner Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1963); The Medal of Honor of the New York Chapter of The American Institute of Architects (1963); The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Medal "for distinguished contribution to the field of architecture" (1976); The Gold Medal for Architecture of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1979); The Mayor's Award of Honor for Art and Culture (New York City, 1981); and The Gold Medal of Alpha Rho Chi, the national professional fraternity of architects (1981). In 1979, I. M. Pei received The AIA Gold Medal – the highest architectural honor in the United States. Three years later he received the Grande Médaille d'Or from the Académie d'Architecture de France. In 1989, the Japan Art Association awarded him the Praemium Imperiale for lifetime achievement in architecture, and in the following year UCLA bestowed the University's Gold Medal. In 1991, Pei received the Excellence 2000 Award and the Colbert Foundation's First Award for Excellence. He was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President George H. W. Bush (1993); the Medal of Arts by the National Endowment for the Arts (1994); the Jerusalem Prize for Arts & Letters by The Bezalel Academy of Arts & Design of Jerusalem (1994); and the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Medal by the Municipal Art Society of New York City (1996). Of the many honors extended, Pei has accepted the Independent Award of Brown University (1997), the Edward MacDowell Medal of the MacDowell Colony (1998), and the American Philosophical Society's Thomas Jefferson Medal for distinguished achievement in the arts (2001). Most recently he was awarded the Henry C. Turner Prize for Innovation in Construction Technology awarded by the National Building Museum (2003); the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Smithsonian Institution’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum (2003); and the Erwin Wickert Foundation Orient und Okzident Preis (2006).